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New Kids on the Block Panquility Joins DC Pan Community

Wednesday, 19th March, by Zahra Gordon



Panquility core members

The Washington DC Metropolitan Area steel-pan community is relatively small consisting of about five bands. This year, however, the community has become one band larger thanks to the founding of Panquility. Lead by local DC musician, Paul "Bassman" Arnold, the group has debuted with a bang receiving a standing ovation and an encore at their first performance.

Panquility was founded early in 2007 when a friend of Bassman's (Arnold prefers to be referred to by this name) was hosting a waterfront wedding and expressed interest in having some steelband music. A three-person piece was quickly put together lead by Bassman and after receiving much praise for their performance, it was there that Panquility began. The name was suggested by one of the members hoping for a "unique" way to describe the band's sound, according to Bassman.

The band's mission is to promote Caribbean culture and their approach is to create sounds that have universal appeal. "These are not your standard MaryAnn, cliché, Caribbean songs. We aspire to be well rounded and do so through fusing genres," states Bassman. Fusion shines through in the diversity of the repertoire and on a song by song basis. The current repertoire includes Sinatra classics such as "More," Allison Hinds classics such as "Iron Bazodee" and new hits such as Alicia Keys' "No One," which has a soca feel.

All of these are songs which were played at the band's premier performance at the 2008 Black History Month

celebration at the Conquest Ministries Church in Columbia Maryland on Feb 16, 2008. The crowd was highly impressed by both the stage presence of the group and the song selection. A mostly American crowd, the audience was elated and surprised when they recognized "No One."

This success may be attributed to the energy of the band. "We have high spirits, are very excited and motivated," says Kaje Arnold, one of the band's tenor players. Kaje joined in June 2007 and it was in joining Panquility that she began playing pan. Kaje, who has previous experience with the piano, says she was "ready for another challenge." She has great aspirations for her band. "I want to see us play on the road [at DC Carnival], in different competitions against big bands and just see us grow," says Kaje, whose sentiments are shared with the other members.



Growth seems to be the first of their aspirations that will be achieved. Since inception, Panquility has grown to 20 members, six of whom are related to Bassman. Currently, all the members are Caribbean or of Caribbean decent, including Bassman who has Trinidadian roots, but this is not a prerequisite to joining. "Anyone who possesses a love of music, is respectful of others, who can dedicate their time and is able to learn the repertoire can join," says Bassman. This lack of discrimination is evident in the players, who range from beginner level to past participants in Trinidad & Tobago National Panorama to members of other local steel bands. The varying level of skill of the players has called for some clever maneuvering. "You have to try to challenge everyone but at the same time make sure it's not frustrating and also make the music sweet," details Bassman. "It's a hefty task but so far everything has been going well."

Bassman, who also plays pan (six-bass and tenor-bass) with PanMasters and bass with several other local groups, has a long history in music beginning with the clarinet at age 11. Later, he moved to trumpet, then to euphonium/baritone and the list goes on. However, Bassman's principal instrument is the string-bass, which is where his moniker comes from. "I naturally gravitate to the lower instruments," relates Bassman, describing a keen interest in bass which can be seen in his six-bass playing and heard in the intricate bass lines of his musical arrangements.

These musical talents have taken Bassman through many different genres of bands such as jazz bands, classical ensembles and even an Elvis impersonator band, all of which are influences he brings to Panquility. Other influences include “pan greats” Clive Bradley, Leon “Smooth” Edwards and Len “Boogsie” Sharpe. Music is neither simply a hobby nor job for Bassman. With such relatives as the acclaimed keyboardist John Arnold, and PanTrinbago president Patrick Arnold, Bassman’s enthusiasm for steel-pan was inevitable. “Music is a part of my life. It is an indescribable thrill that transcends all man made biases and boundaries” says Bassman. This passion is what Bassman takes to the band and also to his teaching, including not only to Panquility, but also Panquility Juniors.

Panquility Juniors is another way that Panquility strives to promote and preserve Caribbean culture. This group consists of the younger members of the band, ranging from ages 6 to 16; they meet outside of regular practice where the youngsters have an opportunity to learn, music theory, pan culture and history and standard repertoire. Panquility Juniors also possess a repertoire of their own. Many of these players are beginners.

Just as some of the members are new to steel-pan, Panquility is a new band. They have new players, new instruments – made and tuned through a combination of Emmanuel “Jack” Riley, Ellie Mannette, Gabriel “Doyle” Robley and Billy Sheeder – and are stepping onto the DC Area’s block with a new sound.



Panquility at Conquest Ministries Church

If you would like more information about hiring Panquility, joining, or just listening to practice contact them through www.Panquility.com. They are based in Bowie, MD.



Panquility on their first gig



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